

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of providing information about a requisition order, comprising the steps:
  - providing an automated agent for receiving and identifying a set of inquiries, and for each identified inquiry, preparing an associated response;
  - a user transmitting to the agent one of said set of inquiries;
  - the agent identifying the transmitted inquiry and preparing the associated response;and
  - using an instant messaging system to send said associated response from the agent to the user.
2. A method according to Claim 1, for use with a given requisition system, and further comprising the steps of:
  - the user preparing the requisition order and submitting the order to the requisition system; and
  - providing the agent with access to the requisition system to transmit information to and to receive information from the requisition system.
3. A method according to Claim 2, further comprising the step of the agent, in response to identifying the transmitted inquiry, accessing the requisition system to obtain an answer to the transmitted inquiry.
4. A method according to Claim 1, wherein the step of the user transmitting to the agent one of said set of inquiries includes the step of the user using the instant messaging system to transmit to the agent said one of the set of inquiries.
5. A method according to Claim 1, wherein:
  - the step of the user transmitting to the agent one of said set of inquiries includes the step of the user transmitting to the agent a request to initiate preparation of the requisition order; and
  - the step of the agent preparing the associated response includes the step of the agent preparing a set of prompts to obtain information from the user about the requisition order; and

the step of using the instant messaging system includes the step of using the instant messaging system to send the set of prompts to the user.

6. A method according to Claim 5, further comprising the steps of:

the user, in response to receiving the set of prompts, providing said information to the agent; and

the agent using said provided information to complete the purchase order, and sending the completed purchase order to a given requisition system.

7. A system for providing information about a requisition order, comprising:

an automated agent for receiving and identifying a set of inquiries, and for each identified inquiry, preparing an associated response;

a user station for transmitting to the agent one of said set of inquiries; wherein the agent identifies the transmitted inquiry and prepares the associated response; and

means connecting the agent to an instant messaging system to send said associated response from the agent to the user station.

8. A system according to Claim 7, for use with a given requisition system and wherein a user prepares the requisition order and submits the order to the requisition system, the system further comprising means for providing the agent with access to the requisition system to transmit information to and to receive information from the requisition system.

9. A system according to Claim 8, wherein the agent, in response to identifying the transmitted inquiry, accesses the requisition system to obtain an answer to the transmitted inquiry.

10. A system according to Claim 7, wherein the user station uses the instant messaging system to transmit to the agent said one of the set of inquiries.

11. A system according to Claim 7, wherein the user station transmits to the agent a request to initiate preparation of the requisition order, and wherein:

the agent includes means to prepare a set of prompts to obtain information from the user about the requisition order; and

the agent uses the instant messaging system to send the set of prompts to the user.

12. A system according to Claim 11, wherein in response to receiving the set of prompts, the user provides said information to the agent; and wherein the agent includes:

means for using said provided information to complete the purchase order; and

means for sending the completed purchase order to a given requisition system.

13. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for providing information about a requisition order, wherein an automated agent is provided for receiving and identifying a set of inquiries, and for each identified inquiry, preparing an associated response, and a user transmits to the agent one of said set of inquiries, said method steps comprising:

the agent identifying the transmitted inquiry and preparing the associated response;

and

using an instant messaging system to send said associated response from the agent to the user.

14. A program storage device according to Claim 13, for use with a given requisition system, and wherein the user prepares the requisition order and submits the order to the requisition system; and the method comprises the further step of providing the agent with access to the requisition system to transmit information to and to receive information from the requisition system.

15. A program storage device according to Claim 14, wherein the method comprises the further step of the agent, in response to identifying the transmitted inquiry, accessing the requisition system to obtain an answer to the transmitted inquiry.

16. A program storage device according to Claim 13, wherein the method comprises the further step of the user using the instant messaging system to transmit to the agent said one of the set of inquiries.

17. A program storage device according to Claim 13, wherein the user transmits to the agent a request to initiate preparation of the requisition order, and wherein:

the step of the agent preparing the associated response includes the step of the agent preparing a set of prompts to obtain information from the user about the requisition order; and

the step of using the instant messaging system includes the step of using the instant messaging system to send the set of prompts to the user.

18. A program storage device according to Claim 17, wherein the user, in response to receiving the set of prompts, provides said information to the agent, and the method comprises the further steps of the agent using said provided information to complete the purchase order, and sending the completed purchase order to a given requisition system.

19. A method of providing information about a requisition order, comprising the steps:

providing an automated agent for receiving and identifying a set of inquiries, and for each identified inquiry, preparing an associated response;

using an application program interface for connecting the agent with an instant messaging system;

a user transmitting one of said set of inquiries utilizing the instant messaging system;

the agent receiving said one of the inquiries utilizing said application program interface;

the agent identifying said one of the inquiries and preparing the associated response;

and

using the application program interface to send said associated response from the agent to the user via the instant messaging system.

20. A method according to Claim 19, for use with a given requisitioning system, comprising the further step of using a database connection program to connect the agent with the

requisitioning system and to enable the agent to send messages to and to receive data from said requisitioning system.

21. A method according to Claim 20, wherein:

said one of the inquiries asks for specific information from the requisitioning system;  
the step of the agent preparing the associated response includes the step of, the agent using the database connection program to access the requisitioning system to obtain said specific information; and

the step of using the application program interface to send the response to the user includes the steps of the agent sending said specific information to the application program interface, and said application program interface sending said specific information, via the instant messaging system, to the user.

22. A method according to Claim 21, wherein said one of the inquiries asks for the status of a requisition order.